Cultivating In The Feminist Theory And Music Garden

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Abstract: This paper was presented as the keynote address for the Feminist Theory and Music 6 Conference at Boise State University, Idaho, July 2001. It is built on metaphors drawn from Adrienne Rich's poetry, remembered through a brief narrative of my personal and academic experiences, linked with my understanding of feminist theory and music. These experiences and understandings explore the value of Feminist Theory and Music conferences, past and present, and ponder directions for the future. I thank the Program Committee of FT&M6 for providing me with the opportunity to present this talk, and many thanks to Philip Brett, Ellen Koskoff, and Elizabeth Gould for their comments and support.
Old Sweaters, Nets, Spray-mottled Books . . .

I have been asked to talk a bit about my path through feminist theory and music. I am honored and humbled. It has been a challenge choosing what to include and what to leave out. My choices reflect a partial and particular understanding. All papers involve performance. So, for this one, though it may not be to the extent that some of you have come to expect from me, I evoke an expatriate community by way of Alice B. and Gertrude, by way of blue gown and flowered hat. I spend most of my spring and summer free time in my garden, so the image as cultivating a garden through several seasons rather than taking a journey makes more sense to me. In this context of cultivating, a process of enriching and reclaiming, I remember reading something by Adrienne Rich that contained the phrase 'a wild passion has taken me this far.' It is a phrase that stuck with me.

It was a wild childhood passion that insisted that I would play the flute because Mary Jo, a slightly older neighbor girlfriend, played the flute. Then there was a secretly wild passion for learning that led my grandmother to push her son and her granddaughters to excel in school. I never knew, until hearing her eulogy, that the strength behind that passion was rooted in her lack of education, an education prevented when my great-grandfather forbid her to accept the college scholarship she had won for having the highest marks in her high school. She learned of that honor in the principal's office, while the boys' scholarships were presented publicly at graduation ceremonies. And, there was the wild passion for talk of politics and religion around the dinner table, encouraged by my parents, that pointed me towards fairness and political action, to marching against the Viet Nam War and for the ERA. Once, my high school English teacher told one of my younger sisters that I'd been a feminist since before the word was invented—his ignorance of that term's history. Basically, I've been too stubborn to take 'no' for an answer, an irreverent brat.

Upon graduating from university in 1974, certainly it was a most wild passion that took me into the Multnomah County Library looking for evidence of women composers. I was embarrassed to learn that C-e-c-i-l-e Chaminade was Cecile and not Cecil. I had played that Concertino for Flute in high school and yet I never even considered it could have been composed by a woman! I wrote to women whose names I found as authors of articles about women in the mid-1970s music journals. Pauline Oliveros replied on the back of her "Beethoven-was-a-lesbian" postcard. I blushed. I was thrilled that Jane Bowers was coming to Portland State in 1976 to teach what was probably the first women-and-music university course, sponsored by women's studies. It was more wild passion that I threw into studying flute with Jane, learning music composed by women. This revived me after my day-job as an elementary music teacher. And, somewhere around this time I was reading Adrienne Rich and found that wild passion phrase. And, it was wild passion that took me into relationships with women. That wild passion flew me to New York City in 1982 where I began work on a doctoral dissertation that aimed to include women composers in school music curricula. At that time, it seemed to me (naive believer in the power of Truth) that all that was necessary to correct the absence of women composers was to do the research and provide the curriculum materials. Still, when I ran out of graduate student funding and began applying for university positions, my well-intentioned adviser suggested that I take the feminism off my resume to ensure better job opportunities. I didn't. WYSIWYG [What You See Is What You Get].

I ended up in Brandon, Manitoba in 1985, even though I didn't know what Manitoba was, let alone where it was. My colleagues there were not so very threatened by the left-leaning feminism I represented. I was fascinated by the more humane (at that time) Canadian political landscape. I participated in the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Lobby to Include Sexual Orientation in the Human Rights Code. Later, with a dedicated committee, I organized the faculty union at Queen's. Always the political action contrasted with the conservative music education profession. To hear the comment, "Oh, You're Roberta Lamb. I've heard so much about you!" upon meeting someone for the first time, was disconcerting because I never knew what they had heard.
Integrity

So, it was this spring while first planting and later weeding my garden, mulling over, panicking, about what I could say to all of you that I remembered this wild passion and connected the idea to Feminist Theory & Music conferences. Certainly Feminist Theory and Music has presented wild passions in varying degree. I dug through my library and found the source. Oh, horrors! Adrienne Rich was writing about a wild patience! Now that's an interesting twist--substituting passion for patience--a twist that might be grist for a therapy session. On the other hand, wild passion and wild patience are crucial to feminist or other critical work within the academy, or outside it.

Writing in 1978, throughout the poem Rich plays with polarities of words, contradictions in life. The poem is a longish one, so I will quote only those verses that resonate for me in the context of this talk and this passion/patience muddle. The poem is entitled "Integrity." Rich begins with Webster's definition of integrity, "The quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety."

**Integrity**
The quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety.

-Webster

A wild patience has taken me this far as if I had to bring to shore a boat with a spasmodic outboard motor old sweaters, nets, spray-mottled books tossed in the prow some kind of sun burning my shoulder-blades.

. . .

The length of daylight this far north, in this forty-ninth year of my life is critical.
The light is critical: . . .

. . .

Anger and tenderness: my selves. And now I can believe they breathe in me as angels, not polarities.

Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius to spin and weave in the same action from her own body, anywhere--even from a broken web.

The Length of Daylight This Far North . . .

What an odd coincidence that the poem's speaker is 49, as I am. This particular self-reflection, looking back at relationships past, of where one has been, what one has or has not accomplished seems to be a mid-life preoccupation. Certainly, nothing that interested us in the 1960s, when we did not trust anyone over 30 and were confident that our generation would end the war, poverty and all social ills, when 'all you need is love' and 'a little help from your friends.' Life is more complicated than that. So the length of daylight becomes central, marking the seasons and time's passage. The daylight reminds you . . . lazy reminisce . . . The daylight nudges you . . . urgency. In the North daylight is so wonderfully long during summer. If one has guided a spasmodic outboard motorboat to this lakeside cottage in summer, then there is plenty of daylight, more than you could ever enjoy, when you are rising long after the sun and going to bed while the sun still lingers above the horizon. But if it is autumn and the cottage is being closed up, the light is fading, melancholic. If it is winter, the light is barely here at all and the chilled darkness can be life threatening. Being in the North means being away from the center of the universe, the States, yet being ever aware of its presence and effect. The length of daylight is critical, containing (as it does) careful, analytical evaluations. The length of daylight is critical to how those of us who are not in the center understand, come to know, to negotiate the intricacies of this global village. Had I remained in the States I could not have thought the way I have or written the words I did, and to this day would have no idea where Manitoba is. The metaphorical North released the restrictions of the Big Ten and the Ivy League. The music education Suits in the States ignored what I had to say but my sojourn into the northern wilderness allowed me to think and explore. It does not surprise me that innovation in music education comes from Canada, that we are among the ones attempting to facilitate change with a spasmodic outboard motor. The question then seems to be, how do we make those innovations effective and maintain integrity, that is remain unbroken and whole (simultaneously realizing that wholeness may be more apparition than reality)?
The Light is Critical . . .

Like the light and length of daylight, Feminist Theory and Music has been critical to keeping this spasmodic motor boat from sinking. Feminist Theory and Music contributes to such integrity as a venue for us to develop our ideas among colleagues who at least do not question the value per se of feminist, queer, and gender research in all areas of music. Now, at FT&M we don't have to begin our presentations by justifying the research area. We can expect to be understood and the confidence of that expectation allows more freedom to explore complex theory or new ideas. Then . . . ten years ago, Lydia Hammesley and her committee organized the first conference on a shoestring, envisioning a conference where feminist theory would be central to music research. It was time. Ellen Koskoff's Women and Music in Cross-cultural Perspective (1989) and Jane Bower's two articles, "Feminist scholarship and the field of musicology" (1989/1990) had appeared within the previous two years. Susan McClary's Feminine Endings (1991) was just being published and, although not yet published, Marcia Citron's Gender and the Musical Canon (1993) and the edited collections, Cecelia Reclaimed (1994) and Musicology and Difference (1993), were in the works. The conference plan was to include musicology, ethnomusicology, theory, composition, and performance. Knowing my dissertation research, Elizabeth Wood encouraged the inclusion of music education in Feminist Theory & Music. In addition to the music education sessions, we held the organizational meeting for Gender Research in Music Education (GRIME). GRIME continues to meet at FT&M, alternating its annual meetings with the MENC. For GRIME, Feminist Theory & Music has provided the critical northern daylight for a feminist music education research network. I am grateful to both Lydia Hammesley and Elizabeth Wood for taking that first risk of including music education. Support for feminist research in music education was not the only critical light in the first Feminist Theory & Music conference. Much 'new' musicology, but especially queer musicology, at least half of Queering the Pitch (1994), began as presentations at Feminist Theory & Music 1991. The evidence for how critical FT&M has been to our work is in the persistence of this conference throughout these 10 years. FT&M was never intended as an ongoing organization. This conference has happened six times because someone has been willing and able to sponsor it at their university and the rest of us have assisted as volunteers, program committees, and presenters. I know of no other cyclical conference that is so ad hoc!

The light is critical . . . making judgments, critical of us. Passion and anger related, but disconnected from the patience and tenderness on the other side of the coin, Western dualities where passion/anger lie polar opposite to patience/tenderness. The light is critical, noticing that from the beginning FT&M didn't get it quite right. There were divisions among the areas of music study replicating the Continental Divides within music departments and schools. The 'crisis of difference' was apparent, for example, in the absence of people of color, even as it was partially addressed in the presence of lesbians and gay men. Yet patience and tenderness were not lacking in that critical light. bell hooks (2000/1984) reminds us:

There has been no other movement for social justice in our society that has been as self-critical as feminist movement. Feminist willingness to change direction when needed has been a major source of strength and vitality in feminist struggle. That internal critique is essential to any politics of transformation. Just as our lives are not fixed or static but always changing, our theory must remain fluid, open, and responsive to new transformation. (p. xiii)

We listened to each other, working to make the partial understanding and vision more complete the next time around. Even with the various struggles bubbling or boiling to the surface in each FT&M, I've always found the conference and the people I've met through it to be a source of replenishment, almost like the comfort of old sweaters tossed in the prow of that old motorboat. Perhaps this is due to the difficult situation I find in music education.
Anger and Tenderness: My Selves / Passion and Patience: My Selves

Music Education has been reluctant to consider feminism seriously. An understatement. But I have no intention of whining on this topic, of going back to the time when passion and anger propelled my work without the wisdom of patience and tenderness. I now see that cultivating feminist scholarship in music education gave me the opportunity for wonderful garden visits and conversations with those of similar inclination in music's other fields. We shared gardening tips and perennials. Suffice it to say that I have been writing on feminist theory, music and education since my 1987 dissertation; yet, 14 years later, it is still necessary to lay out the critical structures of feminist criticism in every music education presentation, or run the risk of being totally misunderstood. This makes me angry still, but now . . . "A wild patience has taken me this far" where passion and patience are not polarities, where, like the anger and tenderness of the poet they weave from Spiderwoman's body into a somewhat whole cloth.

This cloth of anger/tenderness and passion/patience enabled me, with the assistance of two colleagues, to write a feminism and gender research chapter for a music education research handbook. As I took up this task I was reminded of Ruth Solie's essay (1997) describing her experience of writing the "Feminism" article for the New Groves. She evoked Virginia Woolf's austere "Oxbridge" library (1957/1929). She described communications with 30 friends and colleagues about definitions of feminism. But the option of consulting 30 friends and colleagues was not open to me. I received a phone call from a sympathetic editor pleading with me to write this chapter. The original author could not complete the task and a chapter on feminist theory and gender studies was deemed essential to a contemporary research handbook. Our predicament was that the deadline was only one month away. The editor stretched that schedule to six weeks. Here was my version of the black-gowned guardian of the "Oxbridge" library telling me I couldn't enter without a letter of introduction from a Fellow of the Library. This was my introductory letter. I took a deep breath of passion and patience and persevered. Six weeks to the day from the first request the final version of the chapter was accepted by the editor-in-chief.

It was very rocky gardening, with moments where it was likely no produce would make it to market. The sections written by my co-authors on the history of women in music education and feminist theory in curriculum and practice were not problematic. However, basic definitions of feminism, feminist studies, gender studies and women's studies proved to be controversial in every section of the entire chapter. Wild patience and wild passion were central to maintaining the integrity of the research and ensuring the completion of the chapter in the face of such resistance towards a topic supported by over 30 years of solid scholarship (including North American non-fiction best-sellers). Wild passion motivated me to accept this challenge. Wild passion provided me with the drive to see the task, this wild flower, grow and bloom, to become a fragrant bouquet as it left the garden in the market basket. Wild patience guided discussions with the editor regarding definitions of relevant terms and his concerns about bias, lack of evidence, too strong a focus on neglect, the possible negative impact of including lesbian/gay studies or queer theory, and so forth. On the one hand, I steadfastly maintained that queer theory would be included under my authorship. On the other hand, the solution to several of the remaining issues was a statement of limitations. For example, "There is not space in this chapter to present an analysis as to why music education has been so isolated from these theories while the same theories have had an impact on education as a discipline and on music as a discipline. This is an important topic which deserves critical
exploration and thorough analysis." Wild patience was the only means of maintaining integrity.

I don't think these experiences are so very different from those in other music specializations, although they may be more frequent or less talked about in music education. Certainly, I hear of graduate students in ethnomusicology, theory and musicology who encounter this deliberate or ignorant obfuscation of terms, and challenges to alternative approaches. It does appear that feminism and gender studies are "only gender" and not legitimate field areas in music. We do not have the equivalent, of a discipline women's literature or women and politics or feminist philosophy, etc. as a field where a beginning professor can expect to find a position. We continue to be a discipline of contradictions, where there is a dilemma about the place of gender in the discipline itself, as well as a dilemma within postmodern and feminist theory regarding political action, aesthetics, erotics and ethics.

**Critical Questions to Spin and Weave in the Same Action . . .**

So, where are we now, in 2001, ten years later at Feminist Theory & Music? Are we and FT&M in transition as newer issues emerge and developing scholars participate? What is FT&M's changing identity? The theme of this conference is confluence and divide, situated near the Continental Divide, sending rivers of thought to the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Arctic. Are we always going our separate, divided ways? Confluence, rivers flowing and merging, people gathering together--FT&M has always brought all disciplines of music together--that has been its strength, whatever the limitations in practice. As a result, do musicologists, theorists, ethnomusicologists, composers, performers and educators talk to each other more than before? Certainly this happens to some extent at FT&M. I'm forever pulling the learning and teaching implications from the other music areas, most often ethnomusicology and theory. I have heard musicologists say to me, "I didn't realize music education had anything to say to musicology until I heard your work." What happens when we leave? Do we take FT&M to AMS to SEM to SMT to MENC, CMS, etc., etc.? Do we take other perspectives on music, feminism, gender, sexuality, and life to heart and to action? Or do we return like homing pigeons to our assigned cubicles? Do we remember the place this all started from, the wild passion/patience in the uncovering of resistant meanings, the lifeblood needed for social justice? bell hooks (2000/1984) reminds us:

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity one can step into. (p. 28)

Do we remember justice and integrity? Or do we play intellectual games that fascinate us but may not connect to improved quality of life? Our fascinating intellectual games may eventually make meaningful transformations in the world. Puzzles are crucial pieces, yet there is always the risk of becoming narcissistic, of playing with oneself for the sheer pleasure of it all, just as there is the risk in political action that the actions overtake the reason for undertaking movement for change, that the action becomes a simulacrum.

If we are to grow through polarities, if we are to see our 'crisis of difference' grow into a wild meadow garden of passion and patience, if we are to echo the spider's genius to spin and weave in the same action from her own body, from a broken web such that anger and tenderness breathe together, then it seems we must ask of Feminist Theory and Music and our experiences here, "So what? What difference does any of this mean or make?" This obnoxious "so what?" may sound a bit skeptical. It is. Yet the "so what?" is also a source of hope, what bell hooks (1999) calls "integrity of being" and Adrienne Rich (2001) calls the "arts of the possible."
Integrity

Through "so what?" and the hope of "integrity of being" and the "arts of the possible" I come back to the integrity of the wild passion/wild patience that has taken me this far and I imagine . . . I imagine that we are talking to each other, deepening connections through communication and learning from each other. That we might see, as Adrienne rich does, that "art needs to grow organically out of a social compost nourishing to everyone." I imagine that at FT&M we are finding ways to engage paradigm shifts, postmodernism and all kinds of intellectual novelty as part of a process of political action, a linking of theories and practices. Since linking theory to practice is central to learning and teaching, I imagine that we engage each other in discussions of what it means to teach and to learn. I imagine that when we leave the Continental Divide we continue to talk with scholars in other areas of specialization about what it means to teach and learn music with the benefit of feminist movement in a real and critical world.

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The quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety.

-Webster

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